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RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 1535
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 9720
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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [BG](#)
SUBJECT: GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCES STRICT ENFORCEMENT OF
POLITICAL BAN

Classified By: Acting Deputy Chief of Mission Elizabeth Gourlay; reason
1.4(d)

¶1. (U) The Caretaker Government on March 8 announced it would strictly enforce the ban on political activities until further notice, effective immediately. The announcement effectively shuttered party offices and ended the government's informal tolerance of limited political meetings and "indoor" events. The announcement was contained in a press notice issued by the Home Ministry. The note expressly accused the political parties of abusing the government's tolerance of limited activities. The ban applies to "all sorts of indoor politics, processions, rallies and public meetings and political activities" and warns that "stern actions will be taken against the violators of the order."

¶2. (U) The public note gives notice that the government will strictly enforce restrictions on political activities originally imposed under the Emergency Powers Rules of 2007 issued on January 25. Those rules in turn implement the terms of the Emergency Powers Ordinance 2007 issued by the President in conjunction with the declaration of the State of Emergency.

¶3. (SBU) The ban follows a recent increase in the pace of political activity by the parties. On March 3, Hasina publicly called for elections by June. The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) has also increased its public calls for early elections and has begun demanding the immediate release of arrested BNP political leaders. The government was also reportedly concerned by small student protests following the arrest of BNP Joint General Secretary Tarique Rahman and the possibility of additional protests as it continues its high profile arrests of senior political and business leaders.

¶4. (C) Turmoil continues within both of the major political parties. Embassy sources within the BNP report that as many as 49 of about 200 Bangladesh Nationalist Party Ministers of Parliament from the last Parliament meet regularly and have decided that party Chairwoman Khaleda Zia and her son Tarique must go. Many believe party Secretary General Manan Bhuiyan is behind the push. The dissident MPs are reportedly interested in reconstituting the BNP into a military-friendly party and presumably its party of preference in the next election.

¶5. (C) Meanwhile, Awami League Presidium member Abdur Razzaq recently called on CDA on March 5 to confirm press reports that party leaders on March 4 pushed back hard on Awami League President Sheikh Hasina's public call for elections in June, saying that once again she had not

consulted them on an important policy matter. Long a critic of Hasina's, Razzaq said that he and senior leaders Tofael Ahmed, Suranjit Sengupta, Hussein Amu, and Motia Chowdhury (normally seen as a Hasina loyalist) are able and ready to rule the party collectively once Hasina steps down. He claimed that at one point in the Awami League meeting, an agitated Hasina threatened to decamp to the US to visit her family.

¶6. (C) Rumors continue to circulate about possible exile for the "two ladies." Sources within the Awami League have confirmed that Hasina is anxious to travel to the U.S. to visit her son and daughter-in-law, who recently gave birth to their first child, Sophia. Hasina could travel as early as March 15, although some in her party have counseled her against traveling at this time because doing so will feed rumors of her possible exile. According to sources within the BNP, Zia does not have any plans to travel at this time. PASI